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ABSTRACT

Among Puerto Ricans who have migrated to the United States, a significant number have returned to Puerto Rico, while others shuttle between Puerto Rico and the United States. These groups of people are identified as return migrants. Studies suggest that return migrant youth in Puerto Rico have had to make environmental and cultural adjustments that have shaped their perceptions, concepts of group identity, and world views. Return migrant youth are often characterized as being negatively disposed toward self, inconsistent in behavior, alienated from Puerto Rican culture, and limited in Spanish language skills. At the same time, they are described as possessing initiative, respect for work, discipline, and practicality. Relationships between return migrants and Puerto Rican islanders have not been very positive. The islanders complain about the returnees' contempt for anything indigenous, while the returnees are disillusioned when their expectations about Puerto Rican life and culture turn out to be false. Instead of good living conditions, ideal weather, good job opportunities, and friendship, the returnees find themselves confronting poor living conditions, discrimination, mistrust, and misunderstanding. (MJL)

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by

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PUERTO RICAN RETURN MIGRANT YOUTH

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Introduction:

In 1978, we had the opportunity to work with a group of school principals in Puerto Rico in the area of bilingual education. Comments and observations of many of the participant school principals when making reference to the linguistic characteristics of Puerto Rican returnee students, especially at the junior high school level, surprised us. Participant school principals labelled these students "alingual." These school principals were saying that these students were lacking communicative and linguistic skills in English and Spanish. Since the majority of these students came from the United States it was understood that they were able to understand, speak, read and write English correctly and that they were confronting serious difficulties with the Spanish language. Presently, the Federal Government, under the Bilingual Education Act, is providing funds for the development and implementation of bilingual programs in Puerto Rico for students of limited Spanish language proficiency.

The school principals' observations of the linguistic limitations of return migrant students motivated us to begin planning a research study to find out what were the linguistic characteristics of these students and the reasons for these demonstrated linguistic characteristics. When we began reviewing the literature, we found several difficulties in planning and organizing the research plan:

1) student returnees were not homogeneous in terms of age, location, time spent in the United States, time spent in Puerto Rico and degree and length of English/Spanish learning/teaching experience, 2) student returnees' cultural traits (family, religion, attitudes, values, motivations, etc.) were not fully discussed in the literature, 3) their participation or non participation in bilingual programs was not stated or known. Generalizations that were necessary for the planning of the research study were not available through the literature, since research on return migrant youth is scattered throughout the field of Puerto Rican migration. At that time we stopped writing the linguistic research plan and began reviewing the literautre for general characteristics of Puerto Rican migrant youth. This paper intends to present an overview of characteristics of Puerto Rican migrant youth as described in the literature.

Return Migrant Youth: A Socio-Demographic View.

Migration is an everyday and unique cultural reality of a representative group of Puerto Ricans. Although motives for migration and conditions stimulating them vary with time and place it is not yet clear what are the motives of return migrant youth in deciding to reside in Puerto Rico. Theorists suggest that perhaps since Puerto Ricans live in poor conditions in the United States, the idea that they have an "option" to change life styles and socio-economic status are a mental desire that they enjoy and make every effort to make it a reality. Sandis, in the article "Characteristics of Puerto Rican Migrants to, and from, the United States," referring to the motivation of return migrants

says: "We suggest that the migrants' decision to return to Puerto Rico may be motivated either by success or failure in achieving the goals for which they migrated to the mainland."[1] The process of return migration is of considerable interest to social scientists and policy makers because we suppose return migrants have begun to have a significant impact on Puerto Rico's social, economic and cultural life.

Problems of mobility, poverty, school curriculum self concept, motivations and attitudes make educating the return migrant a difficult task. Migration is portrayed as a common characteristic that has become a significant educational problem due to the confounding effects of social, cultural and racial conditions. There appears to be a basic need satisfaction as one of the first concerns to return and many times children also realize this basic need satisfaction. The concept of basic need satisfaction might be one of the reasons these youngsters agree to move with or without their parents to Puerto Rico. The reasons they return is not known. Celia Fernandez Cintron and Pedro Valez Hernandez's study[2] is an attempt to identify reasons why adult migrants return to Puerto Rico. It is supposed that most of these youngsters return because parents or relatives decided to establish their residence in Puerto Rico and these youngsters do not have any options. The Department of Education has not studied these youngsters' reasons for returning. Myers and Mashnick[3] say that among reasons given by U.S. Puerto Ricans to return were "good friends", "new experiences", "good home life", "good climate", "educational opportunities" and "nice neighbors."

In spite of Puerto Rico's financial difficulties, Puerto Ricans are still returning to Puerto Rico. According to a study conducted by the Inter American University and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, there are about 100,000 returnee students in public schools in Puerto Rico.[4] The following are figures from the last school census (1979-1980) of students who migrated to Puerto Rico from the United States:

Level	Rural	Urban	Total
Elementary School	19,095	14,385	33,480
Intermediate School	7,948	19,821	27,769
High School	585	23,000	23,585
TOTAL	27,628	57,206	84,834

Fifty nine thousand eight hundred twelve (59,812) students have spent three or more years in the United States. In the elementary school the grade that received the least number of students was first; sixth grade received the most. In the intermediate level, seventh grade received the greatest number while ninth received the least. In high school, tenth grade received the greatest number while the twelfth grade received the least. The above data tend to indicate that the greatest concentration of students are found in sixth to tenth grade.[5]

The basic motives for return seems to vary according to social class position. Hernandez[6] found that in the 60's many lower class migrants returned to Puerto Rico.

John Macisco and Brian F. Farly[7] found that the socio-economic position of the Puerto Rican population in the New York City labor market can be best understood in terms of the structure of the labor market and its connection with the demand for low-wage labor within the competitive sector. Their concentration within the low-wage sector...provide an explanation for the subordinate economic position of New York Puerto Ricans." The above socio-economic characteristics of Puerto Ricans were found to be similar in other cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia and Boston. These are the parents or the grandparents of the youngsters we are addressing in this paper. In general, it can be suggested that many return migrants come from poor families.

Return Migrant Youth: A Definition

The "return migrant youth" requires a re-definition of the concept so as to allow for a more objective and reliable perspective. These youngsters are not an homogeneous marginalized group. The return migrant youth is defined in the literature as a person of Puerto Rican parentage, who was born either in the United States or on the Island, one who has returned to Puerto Rico to reside. Celia Cintron and Pedro Vales[8] categorized the return migrants into two groups: 1) those who return to their place (or their parent's place) of origin and reinforce their cultural values and ties and reflect a stronger need for a Puerto Rican identity, 2) those who return, but cannot adapt totally and spend a great amount of time travelling back and forth without solving the dilemma of being Puerto Rican or being from Puerto Rico (circular migration).

Frank Bonilla and Hector Colon[9] summarized Pedro J. Soto's description of a returnee youth when he says:

> "Though this young hero is among those who left Puerto Rico against their will (as a child) and wants passionately to reassemble his family and make a fresh start there, he finds no resolution on return to Puerto Rico but flight to the U.S.... The young people of his age that he encounters on the university campus who look and dress like him, and speak in a similar admixture of English and Spanish, are too wrapped up in their own world even to acknowledge his friendly overtures."

This is the common and popular definition of returnee; and is also superficial and simplistic.

Return migrant youths are not simply individuals moving back and forth from one location to another, but are people who think, feel, and think meaningfully. They are social and thinking human entities who create and recrerte their own objective world, and while in this process, they create and recreate their own inner beings. In many ways migrant youth come with diverse ways of thinking, feelings interacting for some apatial and temporal circumstances. This interaction ranges from the extreme of complete segregation to the other extreme of total assimilation. The following aspects affect this process of social interaction: (1) the age of the migrants when they leave their country, and (2) the duration they remain abroad. It has been found that the younger the migrant is when he moves to the U.S. and the longer he stays in the U.S., the more conflicting the process of social insertion back into Puerto Rican society will be.[10] The migrant youths modify their environment and, at the same time construct their own self-perception, their group identify and their particular world view.

Every migrant has to make some adaptations to a new culture and new environments. This aspect takes time, and it is this time that is crucial for the returnees. The literature does not identify these youngsters in terms of years of stay in the U.S. The Puerto Rico Department of Public Instruction divides them into two groups, those that have resided in the United States less than three years, and those who have resided there for more than three years.[11] It is assumed that a minimum of three to four years of living in a foreign country are sufficient for a youngster to manifest a certain common characteristic of that setting. The literature enumerates several demonstrated behaviors of these youngsters:

1. The return migrants have in some instances, an inconsistent character, (a characteristic islanders cannot tolerate), characteristic of the inconsistent environment they have experienced: it reveals the process of "neo-ethnicity",[12]

2. Return migrants feel like strangers in their own land or they might think of the Puerto Rican culture in an idealized way, reinforced by the symbolic representation of a "static" cultural reality which is transmitted by parents, friends, relatives...and by their own imagination;[13]

3. Return Puerto Ricans bring elements of great positivism: individual initiative, respect for work and discipline, and pragmatic philosophy;

4. Returnees have the tendency not to be fatalist and they demonstrate a relative personal freedom. Sometimes moving to Puerto Rico means the loss of their personal freedom;[14]

5. Returnees have a different perception of the Puerto Rican cultural elements, showing an apparent non-appreciation of Puerto Rican cultural patterns. In many instances, these observations are not true and are part of the mythical image of islanders in order to find someone to blame for the negative elements of the Puerto Rican society;

6. The self concepts of these youngsters tend to change to negative concepts of themselves. Pacheco[15] says: "la incomididad de muchos de ellos no esta relacionada solamente con los entendimientos culturales sino con su sentido de estima propia, de capacidad y de adecuacidad para enfrentarse y sentirse que forman parte del nuevo ambiente fisico y social."

7. Most of the returnees have limitations in their language skills in Spanish. The major limitations are as follows, in descending order: reading, writing, understanding, and speaking Spanish. Thus, language ability, either in Spanish or English, seems to be a very important intervening variable in determining adjustment to school.[16]

Islanders Attitudes Toward Return Migrant Youth/Return Migrant Youth Attitudes Toward Islanders.

In discussing attitudes between the two groups, it is necessary to try to objectively think about the following questions that pertain to both groups:

Who rejects whom? Who is discriminated against? Who understands whom? Who disposes whom? Being a Puerto Rican means something completely different for each group, the return migrant youth and the islanders.[17] In many instances they are two clashing groups who belong to the same "culture."

The Islanders complain about the newcomers' contempt for everything indigeneous. Thus, animosity, discomfort and even agression mark the relationship between islanders and returnees.[18] There are some false expectations about "return" such as "re-entry to Puerto Rican life," closeness of family ties." But, once these youngsters go to the Island, they find no place for them in Puerto Rico and many of them decide to come back to the United States.

Perea[19] found that migrant children have difficulties in adapting themselves to the exigencies of the school environment. Perea's study revealed that ability in Spanish was the most influential variable in conditioning the migrant's adjustment. Perhaps, it can be said that the negative attitudes of Puerto Ricans toward return migrant youth develop in the returnee a self defense mechanism, such as the use of English, although they fairly understand and speak in Spanish.

Pacheco[20] in a study conducted with Puerto Rican returnee youngsters found that the majority of the participants showed a negative attitude toward the islanders, and called them in many instances "averiguaos". Return migrant youth complain that they are not accepted by the Puerto Rican people and are also ridiculed.

The returnees come back in search of a "promised-land" where friendship, understanding, good living conditions, job opportunities, beautiful weather and most of all, no discrimination, are working for them. This idyllic island, which exists only in their minds, seems to vanish as soon as the returnees come back. Suddenly, they are confronted with discrimination, misunderstanding and mistrust on the part of the islanders.[21]

Summary

Puerto Rican migrants constitute a mobile population, who settel and re-settle either on the mainland or in Puerto Rico quite frequently. Migration involves a positive diffusion of ideas. Returnees bring to Puerto Rico many positive characteristics and make positive contributions to Puerto Rican society. However, no study has been conducted to identify and discuss these contributions. Most of the literature represents an attempt to describe an awareness of the socio-educational problems many returnees face in Puerto Rico. Despite the fact that there have been some studies of return-migration, such as attitudes of return-migrants toward Puerto Rican culture, studies of the psychological, sociological and educational characteristics of return migrant youngsters deserve further study. Questions that need further study are: 1) What is the meaning of migration and of return migration as experienced by a group of persons that have lived through it? 2) What particular problems do these youngsters encounter throughout the whole process? 3) What was their school achievement and adaptation in the United States as compared to school achievement and adaptation in Puerto Rico?

Once return migrant youth have established themselves in Puerto Rico they go beyond those specific traditional views of culture, traditions and attitudes attributed to islanders; they go beyond those idealistic conceptions they had brought to the Island. They combine what was told to them, what they imagined and what they found; and another human being begins to be developed, who is still a Puerto Rican.

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